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THE BIBLICAL WORLD

VOLUME XXIII

FEBRUARY, 1904

NUMBER 2

SOME INQUIRIES CONCERNING YOUR PASTOR.

EVERY reader of the BIBLICAL WORLD has a pastor, if he is not himself a pastor. The line between pastor and people, *YOUR PASTOR* between clergy and laity, is not so sharply drawn as it once was. The relationship is one of greater sympathy on the part of the layman; of greater respect, perhaps, on the part of the pastor. There are few relationships in life more sacred, few that are more deserving of honest and deep cultivation. Have you ever studied your pastor closely and sincerely, in order to estimate his points of strength and his points of weakness?

I desire to offer a suggestion: that you, the layman, institute an investigation, or, to use a less formidable word, an inquiry. *AN INVESTIGATION* In these days of research, every man who is intelligent should be investigating something. Why not look into the case of your pastor, and make him a subject of careful, conscientious study? To be sure, it might be easier, on some accounts, to study somebody's else pastor; but, everything considered, you may find it advisable to give your own pastor the preference. After him—as many others as you please. It is a question of prudence, which you will settle for yourself, whether the pastor himself shall be informed of the ordeal to which he is being subjected.

First of all, ascertain whether he really feels a vital interest in the work of the Sunday school. This question may be considered first, because it is capable of very definite determination. Is he in close touch with its officers? One may be in the closest

possible touch without being charged with interference; and, in any case, who, pray, has so good a right to interfere as has the pastor? Is he not, in fact, bound to interfere, if he sees that being done which ought not to be done, or that being left undone which ought to be done? Is he satisfied merely to pay an occasional visit, or, on some special occasion, to make a few remarks? Has he practically turned over to others the control of the most important and most fundamental *force* in church work? If so, he has committed a blunder. Is it too much to ask him to teach the Bible class? Surely, no one else is so well prepared to perform this task. In any case, is *his* spirit the controlling spirit in the work? Or has he, with a feeling of unspeakable relief, transferred the responsibility to others, who regard even with alarm any encroachment on his part upon the field of work which they have come to regard as their own? To sum it up, to what extent do your pastor's spirit and ideas dominate your Sunday school?

The most powerful staff of workers in any church society—powerful for good or evil—is the staff of Sunday-school teachers.

Elders and deacons can do harm in a limited degree; DOES HE DIRECT THE TEACHERS? the Sunday-school teachers can work infinite mischief. Does your pastor have his hand on this, the most important body of his assistants? Does he meet with them to confer about the results actually being accomplished? Does he guide them in their individual study? Is he careful to keep the staff, not only strong, but pure? The president of an institution of learning is held responsible for the ability, the character, the general efficiency, of every officer of instruction. Is not the individual church an institution, at all events, of teaching? Is not the pastor the head teacher? Is he not responsible to God as well as to the children for every under-teacher? And not only for the fact that they teach, but also for their teaching the right thing, and for their teaching the right thing well? Is your pastor doing this? Or has he given over to someone else this function of his office? Or is there in your church perhaps

no teachers' meeting, no systematic training of those persons into whose hands has been committed the most delicate and difficult task ever imposed upon a human being?

Your church includes, among its other activities, a men's club? No? I cannot believe it; for unless the men have all moved away, there must be such an institution for their unification and uplifting. Of course you have a men's club. Ascertain whether the pastor takes occasion, now and then, to bring to their attention the Bible, its use, and perhaps its abuse. These men, young and old, have lost interest in the Sunday school. Many of them, perhaps, do not go to church. They like the club for its good-fellowship. Many subjects are taken up—subjects of political interest, of local character. Does the pastor take advantage of this splendid opportunity to get them interested in something of permanent, yes eternal, value? Why do young men so consistently leave the Sunday school when they reach the age of eighteen or nineteen?—a hard question to answer. But, whatever the answer may be, unstinted effort is required to get into their minds and hearts the great facts and the great truths of the Scriptures; for this is the most dangerous period of a man's life, eighteen to twenty-two. Does your pastor have this in mind? and is he making strenuous effort to bring these men into touch with the truth which saves?

We have come to see that "conversion," whatever definition we may give it, or whatever means may have been employed to bring it about, is only the beginning of the Christian life. The child or the man that has turned his heart toward God requires careful guidance, and special instruction. Search diligently to learn whether your pastor is alive to this point; or is he satisfied merely with adding members to the church roll? Is there anything more pathetic than the ignorance of the young man or woman just entering upon the new life? And how frequently the pathos of the case becomes tragic, when, for lack of help so greatly needed, the new life is broken off and the old resumed! Does your pastor

take especial pains to give these ignorant and dependent ones the religious education without which they will either stand still, or go back; or, if possessed of more than common energy and force, perhaps go forward, but, alas, askew? The infinite absurdities which are surely strangling modern religious life find their origin almost wholly in a lack of proper religious education in the first days of the appreciation of the religious feeling. Does your pastor put his hand definitely on these new converts, to train them as they must be trained, if they are to become true and strong and straight?

Does your pastor on stated occasions discourse upon the inspiration of the Scriptures? Does he confidently proclaim that they are of divine authorship—divine in the sense *IS HE SINCERE?* in which no other writings are divine? Does he, perhaps, lay emphasis upon the literal inspiration of these books? Is he accustomed to teach and to proclaim that they come directly from the hand of God, and that any questioning of their historical or scientific character is, in fact, a questioning of the veracity of Jesus Christ himself, who, by his words as recorded in the New Testament, places the divine seal upon the Old Testament as we now have it? If this is his professed attitude, do the facts in his case indicate that he is sincere? Does he really treat the Bible as if he believed in its divinity? Is his soul on fire to bring others to a knowledge of these Scriptures? Does he himself give to their study the time and attention which would warrant the belief that he is really interested in these representations which he makes to the public? Does his general attitude toward the Bible convey to the minds of those who meet him from time to time the conviction that the Bible is what he has claimed it to be? Put on the one side his statements concerning it from time to time, including perhaps his utterances against some fellow-minister whose views are more liberal than his own, and place on the other side the actual facts, a study of which will reveal the inmost thought of his heart upon this subject; and what is your conclusion?

Is your pastor a higher critic? No? Let us make inquiry. Does he take up for study the special books of the Bible, for example, the book of Isaiah or the gospel of John? *IS HE A HIGHER CRITIC?* Does he in such a case try to decide when the book was written, under what circumstances it had its origin, the particular historical situation with which it stands most closely related? Does he make effort to connect the utterances with the events, and the events with the utterances? Does he study the book to ascertain the great purpose underlying its promulgation, and the particular truth concerning God which the author was trying to teach to those who were still strangers to that truth? Does your pastor, in his various addresses to the church from time to time, show that he has secured knowledge of this kind, not only concerning Isaiah and John, but concerning all of the books of the Old Testament and the New Testament? If so, he is a higher critic; for the work involved in securing answers to these questions is nothing more nor less than the work of higher criticism. If he does not seek this knowledge, and make use of it when obtained, he is not a higher critic, nor is he a Bible student. Without knowing these things concerning the various books of the Bible, and without making effort to obtain the mastery of this storehouse of sacred truth, does he, on the other hand, take pleasure in heaping reproaches on the head of the higher critic? Is it a source of delight to him to recount that these so-called higher critics are prompted by a satanic instinct to tear off one by one the pages of the holy Bible, until nothing remains? Is it his custom to denounce those who have given their lives to the study of the Bible, without even having read the statements which are the result of many years of earnest study? Is it worth while to know for yourself exactly how he feels about these things? This will prove to be an important point in the investigation which you are making.

Is your pastor a large man or a small man, intellectually and spiritually? Is he able to maintain an interest in something perhaps outside of his own parish? Is he concerned with the great movements of the church, or of his own denomination? Is he

so large that not infrequently the members of his congregation are disturbed because he is absent from his pulpit in attendance upon some great conference of scholars or workers? Or is he so small that he cannot under any circumstances bring himself to leave his pulpit in the care of another in order that he may get outside of his beaten track and ascertain what his fellows in the world are doing? Does he fancy that he is serving his home work better by always remaining at home, and is his vision so narrow that he supposes an occasional absence does not brighten him and stimulate his church? Is he a man the radius of whose circle is one mile, or ten miles, or a thousand miles? Will you ascertain whether he has ever been invited to address the students of a great university? Or do you recall whether in this society of biblical students, or that company of Christian workers, he has been accustomed to prepare from time to time an important paper? Is his influence limited to those who come in contact with him in his own church, or is he perhaps a man whose counsels are sought in many directions? However strong he may be as an ecclesiastic, does he have strength outside of the church? Is he ever consulted by the business men of his community, or by the laboring men? How much of a leader is he? Does he really lead? Whom? The stronger and the more intelligent? Or is his influence restricted for the most part to the weaker portion of his parish? Is his heart in the forward and aggressive movements of the times, whether of an educational or of a missionary character? For questions of this kind you ought easily to find answers, because in matters such as these one's attitude of mind is generally well understood by the public.

The library of a minister reveals many secrets. Nearly every question thus far suggested for the investigation can be answered by a study of your pastor's library. You will, of course, take into account the amount of his salary; for a minister with a salary of \$600 and with a family, however great his ambition may be to secure books, will be compelled in large measure to deny himself the gratification of this desire. But if he have only two hundred

*HOW LARGE A
MAN IS HE?*

*WHAT KIND OF
A LIBRARY
HAS HE?*

volumes in his library—and it is a question whether a man has any business to enter the ministry with less than five hundred volumes—you can determine with a fair degree of accuracy his character and the measure of his work. Every man presenting himself for ordination to the Christian ministry should be required to submit mimeograph copies of the catalogue of his library; and the character of the list of books thus submitted should weigh heavily for or against his ordination. Is your pastor's library fairly biblical? That is, does it contain a fair proportion of the modern scientific books which will aid him to interpret correctly the Book of books which he is to expound to his people? Does a study of your pastor's library show that he is himself a student, or is he merely a reader? Does he work on the basis of a systematic plan, thus adding from year to year to the stock of his intellectual attainment, or is his work without form and void, scrappy—a little here, a little there—and hence not much of anything anywhere? The chances are ten to one that even a cursory glance over the titles of the books found in his library will tell the whole story. Be sure that your investigation will not be finished until you have examined, at least superficially, your pastor's study.

Too much stress undoubtedly is laid upon the pulpit work of the minister in Protestant churches. Many of our best churches almost entirely ignore the element of worship as a part of the religious life. It is only the exceptional preacher in these days who has a large audience.

*HOW ABOUT
HIS PREACHING?*

Two reasons, among others, may be suggested for this condition of affairs: (1) The literature of the day, in daily paper, weekly paper, and magazine, gives to the public an almost unlimited amount of really excellent religious instruction, including preaching. In other words, the literature of the day has undermined the minister and diminished very considerably the demand of the public for his goods. (2) On the other hand, the minister of our times too frequently goes out of his way to introduce into his pulpit subjects utterly remote, if we have in mind the real purpose of the sermon. The pulpit, therefore, with a portion of its function usurped by the publisher, and with another portion

voluntarily given up in order to make room for something extra-neous, finds itself embarrassed. Does your pastor in the pulpit waste his opportunity? Does he spend his time largely in quoting from the poets? Does he appear to have in his heart the great truths of religion, and is it clear that he himself understands the nature of these same truths which he would have others accept? Is there evidence that he has grasped the real significance of the biblical teaching on the subject which he presents? Does he understand this teaching in its relation to the history of Old Testament and New Testament times, and does he present and apply it with due appreciation of the changed environment in which he lives? Is he at heart a true worshiper of God, and does he know how to lead others in this same worship? Has he searched deeply for the truth as it has come to us in sacred story, and does his presentation breathe the spirit and strength of the sacred story itself? Is it, in other words, biblical in content, in form, and in spirit? Or is it superficial, artificial, and altogether lacking in the elements which make speech persuasive? It is not the popular impression which you are to discover, but the facts.

Suppose now you sum up the case and present it in the briefest possible form. What have you discovered? Is your
IS HE A pastor a student of the Bible? He may be this and
STUDENT OF nothing more, but certainly he must be this if he is
THE BIBLE? to be anything more. Does not a study of the Bible underlie every phase of his work? Is it not his chief business to present the message as it has come through revelation, and is this message anywhere proclaimed so clearly as in the sacred Scriptures? Is not the spirit of his message, not to speak of the content, something which he will entirely fail to grasp, and in turn accept, unless he is in the truest sense a student of the Bible? Can he do better in the presentation of this message than show that his thought is dominated by the very words of the sacred books? The question which you are asked to investigate is then as follows: To what extent is your pastor a student of the Bible; and, being such, to what extent does he accomplish the great task imposed upon him by his Master?